Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim

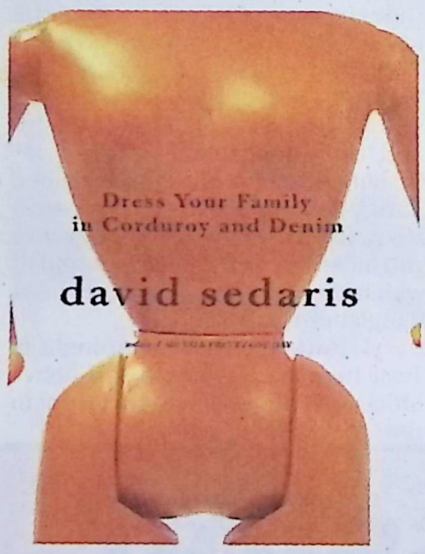
By David Sedaris

Sameeha Suraiya

MEET David Sedaris, the quirky humorist who has his readers entirely hooked and rolling out of their chairs. Grammy Award-nominated American writer, comedian and bestselling author, Sedaris is also a radio contributor. His stuff is funny. People will pay hundreds of dollars to hear him read out from his books, books most would have already read and know where exactly the punchlines lie. So yes, this does prepare those who are not familiar with David Sedaris. And even if you are, the ride can only get more rollicking!

"Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim" is a collection of twenty-two essays chronicling various episodes out of the author's life. He has the ability to find the extraordinary in what others may find ordinary. Sedaris can't help but introduce a common, everyday scene and then point out what is wrong in the picture. What results in is a delightful dose of laughter, as you find yourself asking why you had never thought of it similarly. Such is the case when the author tours the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam and finds himself mentally remodeling the historical landmark to fit his personal taste. Some of the essays are more of confessional pieces. The collection is a riotous journey that opens with his childhood in North Carolina, his odd-job years in New York City, and moving on to his life in France with his partner. What you get is an irresistible cocktail of wit, weirdness and a little of melancholy.

David's family, friends, and neighbors serve as fodder for his short essays, from his miserly Dad to his slovenly brother, to his sister



whose sense of humor may be more outrageous than his. The opening piece "Us and Them" is written in the detached, cold tone typically used to expose the spiritual emptiness of life in the suburbs. The young Sedaris is fascinated by the new neighbours, the Tomkeys who don't watch TV,

"They had no idea how puny their lives were, and so they were not ashamed that a camera would have found them uninteresting", he writes of the Tomkeys. What starts off as a subject of amusement suddenly veers into a moment of self-introspection. As the little Tomkeys arrive at their doorstep for trick-or-treat, the young Sedaris refuses to let go of what little if left of the candies. As he begins to stuff himself with sweets so he won't have to part with them, the adult Sedaris gives us this rendition of what the young Sedaris saw: "He's a human being, but also he's a pig, surrounded by trash and gorging himself so that others may be denied." It's classic Sedaris -- using himself as the butt of the very funny (and messy) joke.

Sedaris is at his best when he is affectionately detailing his family's severe eccentricities. Consider that he has a brother named Rooster. Now consider Rooster's culinary preferences: "Frozen dinners were often eaten exactly as sold, the Salisbury steak amounting to a stickless meat Popsicle." So it figures that when this guy gets married, not all the wedding guests are even human. "The flower girl was in heat. The rehearsal dinner included both canned and dry..." Even if you don't cry at weddings, you'll be crying at this one it is side-splitting, rib-tickling funny.

Sedaris hits a new emotional note in the essay "Put a Lid on It" which reveals more about the author than all of his other essays combined. He writes about the painful gap between him and his sister Tiffany. She lives in squalor, while he wants to clean her dishes, cleanse her life, and see her bloom into the artist that she is. The piece demonstrates that he has a heart, despite what he might tell you, that is too large for him to contain.

In the end, the brilliant comic performance he doles out not only gives you the ticket to laugh out loud, but also offers an appreciation of the oddities of life. Read Sedaris if you think it is okay to laugh at oneself, because that is what he does; the skewed sense of humor and spot-on observance ultimately remind us of the pure pleasure in being able to laugh at our own follies and failures. And that is a lesson to be learnt!